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## A taxonomic review of the Golden-green Woodpecker, *Piculus chrysochloros* (Aves: Picidae) reveals the existence of six valid taxa

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### Abstract

*Piculus chrysochloros* (Vieillot 1818) is a species of woodpecker that ranges from Argentina to Panama, occurring in lowland forests as well as *Cerrado*, *Caatinga* and *Chaco* vegetation. Currently, nine subspecies are accepted, but no study has evaluated individual variation within populations, so the status of these taxa remains uncertain. Here we review the taxonomy and distribution of this species, based on morphological and morphometric data from 267 specimens deposited in ornithological collections. Our results suggest the existence of six unambiguous taxonomic units that can be treated as phylogenetic species: *Piculus xanthochloros* (Sclater & Salvin 1875), from northwestern South America; *Piculus capistratus* (Malherbe 1862), from northern Amazonia west to the Branco River; *Piculus laemostictus* Todd 1937, from southern Amazonia; *Piculus chrysochloros* (Vieillot 1818), from the *Cerrado*, *Caatinga* and *Chaco*; *Piculus paraensis* (Snethlage 1907) from the Belém Center of Endemism; and *Piculus polyzonus* (Valenciennes 1826) from the Atlantic Forest. Both Brazilian endemics (*P. polyzonus* and *P. paraensis*) are threatened due to habitat loss. In addition, we found one undescribed form from the Tapajós-Tocantins interfluvium, now under study, that may prove to be a valid species once more specimens and other data become available.

**Key words:** Taxonomy, Neotropical Woodpeckers, cryptic biodiversity, biogeography

### Introduction

The Golden-green Woodpecker, *Piculus chrysochloros* (Vieillot 1818), is distinguished from other species of *Piculus* by its olive green upperparts, dark barred underparts and single yellow stripe through the face. Colors of the crown and face are highly variable, especially among females, and were the main basis for the description of the nine subspecies (*P. c. chrysochloros*, *P. c. polyzonus*, *P. c. laemostictus*, *P. c. hypochryseus*, *P. c. capistratus*, *P. c. guianensis*, *P. c. paraensis*, *P. c. aurosus* and *P. c. xanthochlorus*) currently accepted (Peters 1948; Winkler *et al.* 1995; Winkler & Christie 2002).

These forms range through most of South America as far north as southern Central America, inhabiting a variety of habitats, including upland *terra firme* and seasonally-flooded *várzea* forests in Amazonia, lowland Atlantic Forest, and shrublands in the *Cerrado*, *Caatinga* and *Chaco* biomes (Winkler & Christie 2002). They are often silent and elusive, and spend most of the time foraging for food under dead wood, characteristics that make them difficult to detect in the field (Baptista 1978). These discreet habits might also be the reason that they are not well represented in collections or are considered naturally rare (Malherbe 1862; Winkler & Christie 2002).

The taxonomic history of this group is rife with disagreements, especially regarding the allocation of specific or subspecific status to various populations. Vieillot (1818) and Valenciennes (1826) described *Picus chrysochloros* from Paraguay and *Picus polyzonus* from “Brazil”, respectively. Malherbe (1862) assigned these two species to the genus *Chloropicus*, and also described *Chloropicus capistratus*, a form from the Negro River, Brazil. In 1875, Sclater & Salvin revived the genus *Chloronerpes* to describe a species with yellow-headed females, *C. xanthochloros*, from Venezuela. Hargitt (1890) then placed all known species in this genus, including *Chloronerpes brasiliensis* (Swainson 1821). This latter form was ascribed erroneously by Cory (1919) to *polyzonus*, when it is actually a junior synonym of *chrysochloros*.